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News Release

NORTH SUBURBAN TEACHER ARRESTED FOR ALLEGEDLY POSSESSING CHILD PORNOGRAPHY

CHICAGO — A north suburban junior high school teacher was arrested today on federal charges for allegedly possessing child pornography, following an investigation by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

Patrick J. Fitzgerald, U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of Illinois, and Elissa A. Brown, special agent-in-charge for ICE investigations in Chicago, announced that Thomas Miller, 29, of 2905 Central St., Unit #2, Evanston, was arrested this morning at his home by ICE special agents.

Miller, a teacher at Wilmette Junior High School in Wilmette, was charged with possessing child pornography, and was scheduled to appear at 1 p.m. today before U.S. Magistrate Judge Arlander Keys in U.S. District Court. He was charged in a criminal complaint that was filed Friday and unsealed today following his arrest.

ICE special agents and Wilmette police met today with school administrators following Miller's arrest. There are no allegations of any misconduct involving children who had contact with Miller.

According to the complaint, on Oct. 3, ICE agents searched Miller's residence with his consent, and interview him. They removed two computers — an older computer which was in Miller's closet, and a newer computer which he used at the time. The following day, an ICE special agent conducted a computer forensic preview of the older computer and recovered about 30 images of child pornography, the charges allege. On Nov. 4, a computer forensic preview was conducted on the newer computer, which allegedly housed five files containing child pornography, some of which had been accessed as recently as late September.

Miller's arrest is part of an ICE global child pornography investigation that focused on an Internet billing company based in Minsk, Belarus, and its affiliated entities in the United States. In January 2004, the Belarus firm was charged with money laundering, as well as providing credit card billing services for 50 child pornography websites worldwide, and operating child porn websites on its own. After dismantling the leadership of the enterprise, ICE agents turned their focus to those customers who purchased child porn subscriptions from these sites in the United States and abroad, including Miller, who the complaint alleges did so on March 27, 2003.

This investigation is part of ICE's Operation Predator, a nationwide initiative to safeguard children against Internet child pornographers, criminal alien sex offenders, child sex tourists, and human traffickers. Since the initiative was launched in July 2003, ICE agents have arrested more than 6,800 individuals nationwide, including more than 340 in Illinois.

The government is being represented by Assistant U.S. Attorney Juliet Sorensen. The Wilmette Police Department cooperated in the investigation.

If convicted, possessing child pornography carries a maximum penalty of five years in prison and a maximum fine of \$250,000. The Court, however, would determine the appropriate sentence to be imposed.

The public is reminded that a complaint contains only charges, and is not evidence of guilt. The defendant is presumed innocent and is entitled to a fair trial at which the government has the burden of proving guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.

"This case is particularly disturbing because it involves a junior high school teacher who was entrusted by the public to care for children," said Elissa A. Brown, special agent-in-charge for ICE investigations in Chicago. "ICE is using all its tools and authorities to target those who prey on and sexually exploit children, both here or abroad. Those individuals with direct access to children take first priority for investigations."

ICE encourages the public to report suspected child predators and any suspicious activity through its toll-free hotline at 1-866-DHS-2ICE. This hotline is staffed around the clock by investigators. Suspected child sexual exploitation or missing children may also be reported to the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, an Operation Predator partner, at 1-800-843-5678 or <http://www.cybertipline.com>.

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of four integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.